

17. RECORDS OF GREY-HEADED STARLING *STURNUS MALABARICUS BLYTHII*  
IN MUMBAI

The Grey-headed Starling *Sturnus malabaricus malabaricus* is distributed in most parts of India except Jammu & Kashmir and Western Ghats (Ali and Ripley, COMPACT HANDBOOK, 1987). The Western Ghats hold the *Sturnus malabaricus blythii* population.

On July 18, 2001, flocks of 50-300 *S.m. blythii* were seen on trees, near Godrej Colony, east Mumbai. These flocks had a large number of juveniles, still being fed by parents. Later on September 22, 2001, a flock of 300 *S.m. blythii* were observed feeding on flowers of *Ficus religiosa*, *F. benghalensis*, *F. glomerata*, *Cassia* sp.; they were once disturbed by a Shikra *Accipter badius*.

About ten *S.m. malabaricus* were seen once at 0630 hrs,

bathing in puddles near a mangrove creek and around five to six times at c. 1730 hrs, mixed with a flock of *S.m. blythii*, till sunset. 25-30 Asian Pied Starling were also seen near the creek.

Such sightings have not been reported from Mumbai earlier, although according to Ali and Ripley (1987), specimens of *S.m. blythii* from Mumbai were found in mixed flocks together with *S.m. malabaricus* in July.

July 1, 2002

MEHBOOB ALAM  
Room #18, 4<sup>th</sup> floor, Building X91,  
Godrej Station Colony, Pirojsha Nagar,  
Vikhroli (E), Mumbai 400 079,  
Maharashtra, India.

18. OCCURRENCE OF THE ASHY MINIVET *PERICROCOTUS DIVARICATUS* (RAFFLES)  
AT THE PARAMBIKULAM WILDLIFE SANCTUARY, KERALA

A pair of Ashy Minivets *Pericrocotus divaricatus* was observed at Anapaddy in the eastern part of the Parambikulam Wildlife Sanctuary, Kerala on December 27, 2001. Parambikulam Wildlife Sanctuary is located at the border of Kerala and Tamil Nadu, on the Annamalai hill range and covers an area of 285 sq. km with habitats ranging from dry deciduous scrub to *shola* forests. The pair, a male and a female, was seen at 1100 hrs on a *Terminalia tomentosa* tree in a mixed deciduous forest plantation also consisting of *Lagerstroemia lanceolata*, *Schleichera oleosa* and *Tectona grandis* trees along with thick undergrowth of *Lantana camara*. The minivets were present in the fringes of a large mixed hunting party of seventeen species that included Scarlet Minivet *Pericrocotus flammeus*, Small Minivet *Pericrocotus cinnamomeus*, Bronzed Drongo *Dicrurus aeneus*, Ashy Drongo *Dicrurus leucophaeus*, Indian Treepie *Dendrocitta vagabunda*, Black-naped Oriole *Oriolus chinensis*, Black-headed Oriole *Oriolus xanthornus*, Common Iora *Aegithina tiphia*, Brown-capped Pygmy Woodpecker, *Dendrocopos nanus*, Brown-headed Barbet *Megalaima zeylanica*, White-cheeked Barbet *Megalaima viridis*, Crimson-throated Barbet *Megalaima rubricapilla*, Blyth's Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus dumetorum*, Brown-breasted Flycatcher *Muscicapa muttui* and Jungle Babbler *Turdoides striatus*. Rosy Starling *Sturnus roseus* and Blue-winged Parakeet *Psittacula columboides* were also present on the tree but did not appear to be involved with the mixed flock. The Ashy Minivets were very distinctive and appeared to stay a little away from the apparent confusion of the centre. They restricted themselves to the lower reaches between 4.6-6 m, whereas the Scarlet and Small Minivets were

seen higher up, at around 7.6 m. After the flock moved a little further, the Ashy Minivets moved up to the place vacated by the other minivets and orioles. Their behaviour did not differ from that of other minivets, except that they were silent.

The HANDBOOK (Ali and Ripley 1987) lists the Ashy Minivet as "An accidental winter vagrant" to the Indian subcontinent, "recorded twice: near Port Blair, Andamans, November 19, 1897 and at Karnala, near Bombay, January 31, 1965". Navarro (1965) reported the bird from the mainland for the first time, sixty-eight years after the first report from the Andamans. It has, however, been subsequently observed in various parts of India like Guindy National Park, Madras city (= Chennai) (Santharam 1988), Sriharikota Island, Nellore district, Andhra Pradesh (Santharam 1990), Periyar National Park (Robertson 1992), Himachal Pradesh (Khacher 1994), Goregaon, Bombay (= Mumbai) (Paralkar 1995), Trivandrum (Kumar 1995), Kanha National Park, Madhya Pradesh (Pittie and Poddar 2000); the records appear concentrated in western and southern India. Over the years, it has been reported regularly at the Guindy National Park. It may be, therefore, regarded as a rare, perhaps regular winter visitor to the Subcontinent in small numbers. This record of the Ashy Minivet is the third from Kerala State after Robertson (1992) and Kumar (1995).

June 5, 2002

S. THEJASWI<sup>1</sup>  
A. SHIVAPRAKASH  
639, "Sibia House", 16<sup>th</sup> Cross  
'B' Block, Vijayanagar 3<sup>rd</sup> Stage,  
Mysore 570 017, Karnataka, India.  
Email: dumaketu@rediffmail.com

## REFERENCES

- ALI, S. & S.D. RIPLEY (1987): Compact Handbook of the Birds of India and Pakistan together with those of Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan and Sri Lanka. Second edition. Oxford University Press, New Delhi.
- KHACHER, LAVKUMAR (1994): Ashy Minivet *Pericrocotus divaricatus* (Raffles) in Himachal Pradesh. *J. Bombay Nat. Hist. Soc.* 91(2): 321.
- KUMAR, C.S. (1995): Unforgettable moments with Ashy Minivet. *Newsletter for Birdwatchers* 35(3): 49.
- NAVARRO, A. (1965): The Ashy Minivet *Pericrocotus divaricatus* (Raffles): an addition to the Indian avifauna. *J. Bombay Nat. Hist. Soc.* 62(2): 303.
- PARALKAR, V.K. (1995): Ashy minivet sighting in Goregaon, Bombay-2. *Newsletter for Birdwatchers* 35(4): 73.
- PITTIE, AASHEESH & AMITABH PODDAR (2000): Ashy Minivet *Pericrocotus divaricatus* (Raffles) in Kanha National Park, Mandla District, Madhya Pradesh. *J. Bombay Nat. Hist. Soc.* 97(2): 283.
- ROBERTSON, ANDREW (1992): Occurrence of the Ashy Minivet *Pericrocotus divaricatus* (Raffles) in Kerala. *J. Bombay Nat. Soc.* 88(3): 455-456.
- SANTHARAM, V. (1988): Occurrence of the Ashy Minivet (*Pericrocotus divaricatus*) in Madras city (South India). *J. Bombay Nat. Hist. Soc.* 85(2): 430-431.
- SANTHARAM, V. (1990): The Ashy Minivet. *Blackbuck* 6(2): 10-11.

19. SOOTY FLYCATCHER *MUSCICAPA SIBIRICA* GMELIN AND ASHY MINIVET  
*PERICROCOTUS DIVARICATUS* (RAFFLES) IN BANDIPUR NATIONAL PARK, KARNATAKA,  
SOUTHERN INDIA

While on a bird survey of the Bandipur National Park (11° 20'-11° 40' N, 76° 20'-76° 32' E) in April 2002, two interesting species were observed — the second record of the Sooty Flycatcher *Muscicapa sibirica* from southern India and the rare winter visitor Ashy Minivet, *Pericrocotus divaricatus*.

The Sooty Flycatcher was observed in dry deciduous forest between April 18 and 20, near the Inspection Bungalow at Chammanalla in the Mulhol range of the National Park. It was the evening of April 18, at 1715 hrs, when a brown flycatcher was observed launching sorties from a dry teak (*Tectona grandis*) tree at an unusual pace, to catch insects above a recently burnt plot of forest. It was similar to the Asian Brown Flycatcher *Muscicapa dauurica*, of which four individuals were also present in the vicinity offering good comparison, but differed in the following aspects *vis-à-vis* the Asian Brown: the Sooty Flycatcher was overall a couple of shades more greyish rather than brownish, bill differed in being visibly smaller and completely black vs. longer bill with a clear pale base to the lower mandible, chest and flanks were washed dusky grey, interrupted by white patches towards the flanks vs. a light brownish wash on chest, longer primary projection with reference to the tertials, a feature clearly visible and helpful in field especially if both species are together as in this case, and a pure white belly and vent appearing in contrast with the chest. The other species of brown flycatchers in southern India, the Brown-breasted Flycatcher *Muscicapa muttui* and Rusty-tailed Flycatcher *Muscicapa ruficauda* are easily separable from the Sooty and the Asian Brown and therefore not confused under ordinary circumstances.

The Asian Brown Flycatchers were noticeably slacker than the Sooty Flycatcher, but this is probably of no consequence other than the possibility of the Sooty feeding in preparation for the migration back to its breeding grounds in the Himalayas. It was observed at the same location for the next two days.

The Sooty Flycatcher's winter quarters in India, for both races *gulmergi* and *cacabata*, are "imperfectly known (records from November to March totally lacking); presumably in the foothills below *c.* 1200 m" (Ali and Ripley 1987), "poorly known" (Grimmett *et al.* 1998). Zacharias and Gaston (1993) record it from Wynaad (11° 15'-11° 55' N, 75° 45'-76° 30' E), but the record is treated as unconfirmed by Grimmett *et al.* (1998) and Kazmierczak (2000). This record of the bird, then is the first from southern India, if accepted. The similarity with the Asian Brown Flycatcher has probably resulted in individuals of the species being overlooked, but it may also be that the bird is a vagrant and should be treated as such until the emergence of further evidence to the contrary. The Asian Browns are common breeding residents at Bandipur. A 2 km transect in Chammanalla during the same trip had nearly twenty-five pairs and eight nests.

The Ashy Minivet, a female, was seen while on transect on the Karnataka-Tamil Nadu border on April 19. The habitat was a dry deciduous-moist deciduous interface with *Tectona* and *Terminalia* as the predominant vegetation; semi-evergreen trees like *Mangifera* were present along a dry stream-bed nearby. The bird had complete ash-grey upperparts, a black tail with thin white borders, white throat and a greyish wash on the underparts. It flew in from thick forest and settled on a small *Syzigium* tree before joining a mixed hunting party of birds that included the Great Black Woodpecker *Dryocopus javensis*, Small Yellow-naped Woodpecker *Picus chlorolophus*, Scarlet Minivet *Pericrocotus flammeus*, Black-headed Oriole *Oriolus xanthornus*, Black-naped Oriole *Oriolus chinensis*, Indian Scimitar Babbler *Pomatorhinus horsfieldii*, Quaker Tit-Babbler *Alcippe poioicephala*, Velvet-fronted Nuthatch *Sitta frontalis*, Black-lored Yellow Tit *Parus xanthogenys* and Black-naped Monarch-Flycatcher, *Hypothymis azurea*. The bird kept